

**Political History Collection  
Interview H.0014.02 : Tape 2**

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**Interviewed by:** Melvyn Goldstein and Tashi Tsering  
**Name:** Gyentsen Tempel [Tib. rgyal mtshan bstan 'phel]  
**Gender:** Male  
**Age:** 62  
**Date of Birth:** 1931

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## **Abstract**

Gyentsen Tempel [Tib. rgyal mtshan bstan 'phel] was a monk official from the shagtsang of Jigyab Khembo Gyambumgang. He later became a tsendrön in the Dalai Lama's Secretariat. In this interview, he talks about taking an edict to Tsang and the big meeting in Shigatse in 1958 between all of the officials of Labrang and the Tibetan government and also all the Chinese officials at which Surkhang spoke about the Khambas. He also discusses the March 10th demonstrations and his work in Norbulinga with the weapons that were handed out.

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## **Tape 2**

**A:** We told him [Surkhang], "Tan Guansan said we should return with him tomorrow." Surkhang said, "It isn't at all permissible if you go back. You were sent by the Kashag to talk with the Khambas, so it is important that you wait in Gyantse. If the two of you were to return saying that Tan Guansan told you to return, you might get scolded by the Kashag." Therefore, the two of us were in a dilemma about what to do because Tan Guansan told us to go back and Surkhang was saying that this was not permissible. So the two of us had a discussion and decided that since the Kashag had sent us, we should follow its orders and go to Gyantse. So we went to Gyantse.

We stayed there for 19 days and distributed the edicts. No Khambas came, but one time we received an urgent (Tib. dayik) message saying that the Khambas were coming. We heard that there were some Khambas in Nangkartse, but we had no plan to go to Nangkartse since it was a part of the Lhoka area and there were other people going to Central Tibet, Ü [Tib. dbus khul], [to distribute the edicts there]. We didn't meddle in any of the areas beyond the Tsang area. In Gyantse, there was the Gyantse Branch Office of the Tibet Work Committee [Ch. fen gong wei]. There weren't many soldiers and cadres in Gyantse, so the cadres asked us to stay since they thought that we could be of help if the Khambas came, although, we wouldn't have been of any help [if they came]. So that's why we stayed 19 days. Then we got a telegram from the Kashag through Shigatse saying we should return to Lhasa. However, the Chinese office in Gyantse said stay. Because there were two governments, our work was very hard.

**Q:** At that time, didn't Surkhang give another lecture?

**A:** No, he didn't say anything. He just said that we should do whatever the Kashag told us to do. "After you arrive in Gyantse, we will wire you when it is time to return."

**Q:** When was this? Was it in summer?

**A:** It was in fall. The harvest was just completed. About the 8th-9th Tibetan month. When we asked the Gyantse Office to give us a car, they got angry and refused.

**Q:** At that time, was Yin Fathang there in the Work Committee?

**A:** No, he wasn't there. The Kashag had given us a very good travel document, not only for imposing the horse corvée and the pack animal corvée tax, but it was also written that we could do whatever we would like to [Tib. blos dpyad]. So we imposed the horse corvée and came back. Then, from Shigatse, we got a car and returned. At that time, Drangtöba insisted on going to his home in Kharkha [Tib. mkhar kha], so we stayed overnight. The Gyantse Office kind of andry and telegraphed Tan Guansan that we didn't listen to their order and left. Lobsang Tsültrim told us that when we returned to Lhasa, "You again made them agitated in Gyantse." We said we had no choice as the Kashag ordered us to return, and it was the Kashag who sent us. The the Branch

Office wanted us to stay, but we had to come back.

Later, in 1959, I was involved in the revolt and I was imprisoned for 19 years. So I had to confess, in detail, about that in my entire history.

**Q:** Let's go back to the Shigatse story and the meeting that was held. What happened in Lhasa?

**A:** First, I will tell you about Shigatse. A meeting was held where all the Labrang officials [Tib. zhabs 'bring], all the officials of the Tibetan government, and all the Chinese officials attended. About 1,000 persons attended. At this meeting, Tan Guansan spoke first. He said that the Tibetan government was not working well or correctly. He criticized the Tibetan government [saying]. "Up to now, all of its outward work has been done in agreement, but secretly it was opposing it [Tib. mngon brtsi lkog 'gal]. This is not at all okay." At this time, Numa Depön was in charge of the regiment stationed a bit up from Shigatse in Dingri. He transferred all of his ammunition to Shigatse, so Tan Guansan praised him saying that he had done very well. Then, he probably meant the two of us, though we didn't do anything wrong, we were scolded [Tib. bka' bkyon] a lot and he said, "There are a few people here who were sent by the Local Government to do a job, but they didn't do anything at all." Actually, we didn't meet the Khambas, so we didn't have anything to do. He said, "If this was the CCP and if someone was sent to do a job and they didn't accomplish it, they would be executed." Then Surkhang gave the speech.

**Q:** What I heard was that while Tan Guansan was giving the lecture, Surkhang was pretending to doze off and acted like he was inattentive. Did he do that?

**A:** Probably, he might have done that. I wasn't paying attention to that. Then Surkhang spoke. What he said was regarding the Khambas, and [how] the Khambas were launching revolts and going everywhere. He said, "From the beginning until now, we, the Local Government, have never violated the Central Committee's orders. Until now, we have been doing our best. As to the Khambas, we have reported to the Work Committee many times saying that, 'The Khambas are launching disturbances. Please eliminate the Khambas.' Since the Central Committee couldn't eliminate them, how can we eliminate them? And actually, most of these Khambas do not belong to the Tibet Autonomous Region and the local Tibetan government. Most of them are the Khamba Tibetans from the four provinces, Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai. So if we try to give orders to them, how can it work out? So the Central Committee must take whatever action is needed. You are scolding us a lot saying that the Tibetan government is not doing well, but this is the case. How about this? You should think about it carefully."

**Q:** Did anyone else speak after that?

**A:** Then Lhamön spoke. He said only general things that sounded nice. He would only say these general kinds of things. We all know that. [Note: Because he was from Tashilhunpo, which was very pro-Chinese].

**Q:** I heard that regarding the Khambas, Surkhang said, "This is not our job, this is your job."

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Did Surkhang talk about the reason why the Khambas came to Tibet and did he say that "You the Chinese have caused them to come to Tibet. We didn't make them."?

**A:** No, he didn't and he wouldn't have said that at that time. The kudrak of the local government were very tricky and they wouldn't talk straightforwardly, like fighting. They were complicated and not easy [to cope with]. [laughter]

At the time before I was sent to Gyantse, I met Ngabö, who was the main one in the Kashag, to get the Kashag's instructions. He told us internally, "Go ahead and disband the Khamba's organization [Tib. sgrig gzhi] and try to get them to disperse. You should say that to them. Nobody will investigate [Tib. rtsad gcod] about this." But we didn't accomplish anything since we didn't meet any Khambas. And [in any case], we were afraid to tell the Khambas to disband. Since the Central Committee couldn't handle them, how could we handle them?

**Q:** At that time, you might have thought that you would have to go there to expel the Khambas because you were sent there, but you must have been scared also, and there was a danger to your own life, right?

**A:** Yes, we were scared.

**Q:** You thought that you should just try to accomplish as much as you could, right?

**A:** Yes. But we didn't have any means to put much effort into it. If we did too much, there would have been a danger to our lives because all the people [Khambas] had [said they would] sacrifice themselves. These people had rebelled and caused trouble in Kham, and then came to Tibet.

**Q:** At that time, did you think that you could disband their organization?

**A:** Because their organization had already taken root, how would they listen to us? So I thought it would be difficult, and it was hard to have confidence in disbanding their organization. I didn't have that kind of confidence. At that time, they were surrounded by the People's Liberation Army and they were in a difficult position. So I thought that if we, the Local Government, would talk to them and if they would listen a little bit, we might be able to get a response of some kind. Otherwise, why would they listen to the Local Government since they had already become like wild boars going into the hills? So it was hard to estimate the situation.

**Q:** Did you know anything about the U.S. supporting Chushigandru and dropping weapons and people at this time?

**A:** Nothing at all. Later, in 1961, in prison, many spies were there and they said they had been trained to parachute in American

for two months. They had dropped guns, the Dalai Lama's photos, gold coins, etcetera, and they did things in Kongpo. I heard [about this] a little bit, but not in detail. This was in Sangyib Prison in Lhasa.

**Q:** When did you arrive back in Lhasa? Was it in 1958?

**A:** At the end of 1958.

**Q:** What was the situation in Lhasa at this time? What work did you do?

**A:** In Lhasa, everything was calm. Then in 1959, when the Dalai Lama joined the Mönlam Prayer Assembly [Tib. tshogs dbus], we came in the procession. Then somewhere near Sechung's [Tib. gsar byung] house, two Chinese with weapons were caught. And there were a lot of rumors about how the Chinese were doing evil things and carrying weapons, and this was something extraordinary [Tib. dpe ma srid pa], though there might not have been any plot against the Dalai Lama's life. There was this kind of public opinion [Tib. gleng phyogs].

**Q:** Did you think that the revolt was about to happen?

**A:** No, I didn't at all. It was kind of calm. The revolt happened suddenly, though the Central Committee was saying that this did not happen suddenly. So when we said that it happened suddenly, we were refuted. [laughter] To tell you the truth, I think that the Tibetan government didn't completely follow the 17-Point Agreement and the Central Committee didn't forgive them [the Local Government], but we didn't have the courage to launch a revolt. What we heard in prison was that the kudraks had the basic thought [idea] of taking the Dalai Lama out [of Lhasa/Tibet]. But I didn't hear details about the Local Government doing this work.

At that time, I was in the Tse ga. On 30th of the 1st month, in the morning, Phala said, "Tomorrow the Dalai Lama is going to the [Chinese] Military Headquarters [Ch. jun qu] and not a lot of people can go. So you four tsendrön discuss and decide who will go with him."

**Q:** Was that in the evening?

**A:** It was on the morning of the 30th. I said I could not go since I had to work at the Tibet Autonomous Region office. The plan was for the Dalai Lama to go to the Tibet Autonomous Region building before leaving for the military headquarters, so I had a lot of work.

As for the entourage, the officials above the 3rd rank, the dzasa and theiji, then the bigger trülku and the current abbots of the three great monasteries, were to accompany the Dalai Lama. This was the initial plan. When I came back, I saw that the Work Committee [TWC] was also using metal detectors on the way because the Dalai Lama was invited. I didn't have any doubts. On the 1st, I went to the Tibet Autonomous Region office at 9 a.m. Sumdo was there. We heard that a lot of people were going to Norbulinga, so we sent the sweeper to the roof and he said it was true. When I went outside, the abbots of the three monasteries and a lot of kudrak had arrived at the Tibet Autonomous Region [building]. Then, gradually, there were less and less as they left. Then we got a message that Chamdo Khenjung had been killed and his corpse was being dragged to Lhasa. Like this, the disturbance took place.

**Q:** This was when you were at the Tibet Autonomous Region [building], right?

**A:** Yes, I was not at the disturbance there [Norbulinga].

**Q:** What was Barshi Jedrung [Tib. bar gzhis rje drung] doing at that time?

**A:** He was also a tsendrön working with us.

**Q:** He was out there [in India] and he said, "We didn't like [the Dalai Lama] going to the [Chinese] Military Headquarters. So I wrote a sealed letter to the three great monasteries and told them the people should come and take action, and we also called for the people of Lhasa to come." Is this true?

**A:** He was a tsendrön with me. But I don't know about that.

**Q:** What was he like? Was he really anti-Chinese?

**A:** Yes. He was strongly anti-Chinese.

**Q:** How old was he then?

**A:** He was young and big, about 26-27 at that time. He was from a big family and had great loyalty to the old society [Tib. rnying zhen chen po]. There were different sorts of people. Some liked the old society and didn't like the new society. Some first liked the new society and then opposed it. Some first liked it, and stayed liking the new society and went on the socialist path.

**Q:** Barshi Jedrung said that some tsidrung who had gone to China and studied there then didn't like the Chinese and opposed China. They had a small group of people, such as Ngawang Thöndrub?

**A:** They probably did.

**Q:** Ngawang Senge [Tib. ngag dbang seng ge] was also in this, right?

**A:** Oh, yes he was there. His real name was Lobsang Yeshe [Tib. blo bzang ye shes].

**Q:** Did you hear about that organization in prison later?

**A:** No, they didn't come to the prison and some of them died. Six of them had gone to the Beijing Nationalities Institute [Ch. zhong yang; Tib. mi rigs slob grwa]. Some died, some are still progressive [Tib. yar thon]. One of the tsidrun called Kunga [Tib. kun dga] something became the director [Ch. zhu ren] of the National People's Congress in Lhoka.

**Q:** Is he still there?

**A:** Yes. When they went first, they petitioned the Yigtsang Office. They said, "The 17-Point Agreement is signed and we have to work on the unification of the motherland. It would not be okay to remain like an idiot like this. We need some knowledge and education, so we want to go to China to study Chinese and be able to know the situation. Then we will return to Tibet and we will be able to work. This is our goal."

**Q:** Tashi Tsering. There was Tsadora Champa Tendar among them, right?

**A:** No, he was not [there]. He became the teacher of the Cadres' School [Tib. las byed slob grwa] in Lhasa, and then he became the teacher in Beijing.

**Q:** So, how did you get involved in the revolt?

**A:** A notice came telling me that I should come to a meeting at Norbulinga at the Shabden Lhagang on the 2nd. "Whoever it is, it is not okay, if they do not attend the meeting."

**Q:** Who brought the notice?

**A:** Normally, the notice would be given by a messenger, but it was said that the tsendrön seated next to you should deliver the message, and Dombor Tsendrön Ngawang Rigdrol [Tib. gdong por ngag dbang rigs grol] passed me the message. At the meeting, they said, "From now on, we have to oppose the Chinese. And those in Chinese offices, the Youth League and the Woman's Association can no longer go. Those in the [TAR] offices need to make a guarantee saying they will no longer work there. If you are going to the Chinese, get out right now."

**Q:** Who said this?

**A:** There were some people. So they said we had to sign at the meeting.

**Q:** What kind of guarantee?

**A:** It was to guarantee that from now on we wouldn't work for Chinese office. "If there are those who want to work for the Chinese office, you should leave now." But no one left since they would get shot in their butt if they did. At that time, most of the government officials went there [to work]. Some kudrak made their determination [decision] and didn't come at all, like Ngabö, Tsögo, Trendong [Tib. bkras mthong] Khenjung, Janglojen Gandrön [Tib. lchang lo can], Denja [Tib. ldan bya], and Lobsang Chömpel [Tib. blo bzang chos 'phel], who was the monk official of Tsendrön Tsenlela's [Tib. mtshan legs lags] monk household. Now he is in the Political Consultative Conference [Tib. chab gros] of the Tibet Autonomous Region. They were all with me at the Tibet Autonomous Region office. And there was Thangbön Tshetob [Tib. thang dpon tshe stobs]. At that time, even the present progressive people, like Horkhang, Kapshöba [Tib. ka shod pa] and Changöba [Tib. bya dngos pa], were at the meeting. They were able to go to the Work Committee after they came back from the meeting.

**Q:** Why weren't you able to go?

**A:** I probably didn't go because my brain was not good then. [laughter] My brain became crooked, to tell you the truth. I should have signed my name on that day and gone [to the Tibet Autonomous Region office] like they did. At that time, the Tibet Autonomous Region sent cars to protect all the cadres. A car also came to take me. Later, in jail, Tsögo came and said, "We didn't do that specially for you. But since you were a Tibet Autonomous Region cadre, it is not the case that we didn't protect all the cadres and we sent a car for you, but you had already gone there [Norbulinga]. But you should confess well." [laughter] Basically, I was different from the other kudrak because our work was to be done in the morning when we went to the Drungja in Norbulinga. We were to serve the Dalai Lama. The other kudrak didn't need to go like this.

**Q:** At the meeting, when it was said we have to fight the Chinese, did you think that was possible?

**A:** Most of the people in the local government were thinking that we would not be able to oppose [the Chinese]. I am telling you the truth. The kudrak were saying, "How can we make war if we don't have good soldiers, and we don't have the military provisions and we didn't make any preparations?" They were saying, "They are going to make war, but how can we make war?" But since the people had risen, we didn't have anything to do because they shouted near the gate of Norbulinga and called the kudrak "dayan eaters", and said, "From today on, the Kashag and Yigtsang will not have any [power] to meddle in the matter [Tib. jus gtogs med]."

**Q:** Were they saying that they had called the masses to the meeting in the Shabden Lhagang?

**A:** The representatives of the people were the ones with power. They had selected the representatives who were mostly like chandzö and nyerpa, and the lower level officials in the government treasuries in the Potala and the Jokhang, like the chagnang. The real masses were not that educated, but those people I mentioned above were organized and they were saying that. Manang Abo [Tib. ma nang a pho] was one of the top leaders. They brought two Khambas with white hair who related all the bad things the Chinese had done in Kham. They spoke in detail at the start of the meeting.

**Q:** Didn't any kudrak ask how can we fight the People's Liberation Army?

**A:** No. They would be afraid to say that because the masses had risen and they didn't interfere with them.

**Q:** Didn't any people say at the meeting that we should start the talks again?

**Q:** No. At this time, even the Dalai Lama said, "The best is [not to make a disturbance]. Please don't make a disturbance. In case, you are going to make a disturbance, please don't do it here [in Norbulinga]. If you do that, the Central Committee will be agitated. Since the Norbulinga is in the open field, my life is in danger. In case you want to meet, meet somewhere else outside."

**Q:** Was this on the 2nd?

**A:** Yes, he said that at the meeting.

**Q:** The Dalai Lama himself didn't attend the meeting, right?

**Q:** Yes, the Dalai Lama told the Kashag and they told the drungtsi, and they related this at the meeting.

**Q:** When he said that, what did the masses say?

**A:** Then the meeting said that the Dalai Lama's life was in danger, so we must set up bodyguards, and they made the disturbance. They made preparations to make war in the name of the being bodyguards. . Then they met at the printing house, Shöl Parkhang [Tib. zhol par khang] from the 3rd . There were about 30 odd delegates at the meeting and they made all the decisions. The normal offices, like the Kashag and Yigtsang, had no interference with the meeting. They started a command headquarters [Tib. bka' bkod khang] at Norbulinga. This was to give orders to the bodyguards, and they were the heads for making war. They [the meeting] appointed some kudrak to run it who they considered trustworthy.

**Q:** Is there anyone from the 30 delegates still alive?

**A:** Yes, there is.

**Q:** Was the head of the Dalai Lama's Dance Group Garpönla [Tib. gar dpon lags]? And Tamdrin [Tib. rta mgrin] worked at the treasury in the Potala [Tib. Tse Nyertsang]?

**A:** Tamdrin was one of the delegates, but I don't think Garpön was there. But I can't think of anybody who is still alive.

**Q:** Are any of the people's delegates still alive?

**A:** They were the people who had power. Then there was the command headquarters, which was said to be for the bodyguards, but they were doing things about weapons.

**Q:** Where were you and what did you do then? Were you in the Parkhang or Norbulinga?

**A:** From the 2nd I was in Norbulinga, and I didn't come back (home). Phala Thubden Wönden said to us, "These people from outside are coming to protect the Dalai Lama. You (tsendrön) people are the ones who serve the Dalai Lama regularly, so how can you leave and go home?" So I stayed. There were many government guns in Norbulinga that had been given out to the bodyguards. Phala told us that the people who gave the guns didn't make a good list, so four senior tsendrön should go and make a list of who got what. The reason Phala said that was because he was one of the ones in the command headquarters, and he was also our leader. We were sent to the Shabden Lhagang, which is located below the command headquarters. They had given [out] many guns and it took many days for us to make the list.

**Q:** How many guns were handed out?

**A:** A little less than 3,000.

**Q:** This was along with the ammunition, right?

**A:** Yes, they didn't give many bullets. They just gave 15 bullets for each gun. Then the headquarters appointed us to be in charge of the guns [Tib. me mda'i do dam pa]. We, being Ngawang Rigdrol and myself, and the tsidrung nicknamed Torma [Tib. gtor ma] and another one who went to China and died. Under us, there were 8 staff [Tib. leja], 4 lay officials and 4 monk officials. We got the guns and bullets from the armory, and brought them to the Norbulinga and handed them out, etcetera. Actually, it was kind of ridiculous to make war, but if you said that, they would finish you. It was dangerous and there were a whole lot of troubles. At that time, it was not okay if we didn't do that. But in my mind, I wondered how could we accomplish [Tib. khungs 'khyol] this because I knew about the army of the Chinese. In 1950, the local government had some power and we had quite a lot of troops, and there were also the militia and the military provisions. At that time, the government fought the Chinese and did their best, but we couldn't accomplish it. Nowadays, some people say baseless things, [like] that the kudrak flattered the Chinese and were taking Chinese money, and they didn't fight with the Chinese at all. If they had fought the Chinese well when there was no road, the Chinese couldn't have come. They were saying something like the kudrak were incapable. But that isn't true since we fought the Chinese.

**Q:** At that time, were they talking about the U.S. helping?

**A:** America was far away and they couldn't contact the U.S. When they [Chinese] were coming up, we sent five groups consisting of two people to America, Britain, France, and also to China, but Nehru didn't let them go from Delhi and they had to come back.

**Q:** I mean at the meeting held in 1959.

**A:** They didn't talk about that at the meeting. Ngawang Rigdrol was sitting next to me and I told him, "If they cause a disturbance like this, since the Dalai Lama is here, his life safety is very important. So you must be better. You stand up and say loudly, 'Do not cause much [of] a disturbance.'" And he said that. But they didn't even listen to us. At that time, all the people were talkers and there were no listeners. There was such chaos at the meeting.

**Q:** Then the war was lost and you were imprisoned, right?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** I heard that on the 3rd to the 4th, the Dalai Lama called the delegates from Shöl Parkhang to Norbulinga, and gave a speech and told them not to do that. Were you aware of this?

**A:** I was not aware of this. I just heard that the Dalai Lama said something in brief to some people. At that time, I was in the Shabden Lhagang all the time doing my work. They must have briefly visited the Dalai Lama in his room. Otherwise, there wasn't any widespread meeting.

**Q:** Did you know when the Dalai Lama left for the outside [fled to India]?

**A:** I didn't know at all. I just had doubts and thought that we shouldn't stay like this, and I went to the command headquarters. I am telling you all of what I thought then. The Magji, Lodrö Kelsang [Tib. blo gros skal bzang] and we were talking about the guns. He said to me, "What is going to happen to us? The Dalai Lama is staying on that plain [open area]. It is not good at all. What do you think?". He was also one of the delegates. I was suspicious that he might have been testing me about what I knew. Then I said, "If the Dalai Lama were to stay in the open field and if they were to fire cannons, it would be very dangerous, right? I think that it would be better to stay in the Potala." He said, "I also think that it would be better to stay in the Potala because it would be safer." Later, I came to know that they had [made] the plan for his escape. On the morning of the 8th, I was there sleeping, and after awhile, I heard the sound of a truck driving. I wondered what it could be. In the Gusung Regiment, they had a truck team for transporting supplies, so I was wondering why they drove the truck so late. Later, I came to know that he [the Dalai Lama] left at that time, and the Dalai Lama didn't go in the truck and he went walking. The two tutors and the Dalai Lama's mother were driven in the truck.

**Q:** They drove them to the riverbank, right?

**A:** Yes, the Dalai Lama left through the southern gate walking to the place where Kündeling Wöser Gyentsen [Tib. 'od zer rgyal mtshan] had prepared the horses. They kept it very secret and didn't use the government horses. We were kind of working near him, but we didn't even know that. Among the monk official cooks of the Dalai Lama, there was only one who knew about that. He came back from India and he is here.

**Q:** What is his name?

**A:** He was called Gyentsen Chömpel [Tib. rgyal mtshan chos 'phel]. We were in the same tratsang. They trusted him and he can tell you all the things about that. He said that they placed a statue on his head and told him that he was not allowed to tell anybody about that [the Dalai Lama's escape].

**Q:** Thank you very much, it is very useful.

**A:** I told you all the things that I know and also the things that I didn't know well.